

# Pasolini's *Medea*: using μῦθος καὶ σῆμα to denounce the catastrophe of contemporary life\*

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## Abstract

From Pasolini's point of view, *Medea*'s tragedy is likewise the tragedy of the contemporary Western world and cinema is the semiology of reality. His *Medea* thus becomes an ancient myth pregnant with signs to be interpreted by attentive viewers. The aim of this article is to put forward reasoned interpretations based on a close analysis of the images and verbal discourses (*lógoi*) of Pasolini's script, ever mindful of the explanations given by the director himself that have been published in interviews, articles and other texts.

**Keywords:** Pier Paolo Pasolini; *Medea*; Greek tragedy; classical tradition; cinema; semiology

**Resumen.** *La Medea de Pasolini: utilizar μῦθος καὶ σῆμα para denunciar la catástrofe del mundo contemporáneo*

Desde el punto de vista de Pasolini, la tragedia de *Medea* equivale a la tragedia del mundo contemporáneo y el cine es la semiología de la realidad. Su *Medea* deviene así un mito antiguo repleto de signos que requieren la interpretación de espectadores atentos. El objetivo de este artículo es proponer interpretaciones razonadas basadas en el análisis minucioso de las imágenes y de los discursos verbales (*lógoi*) del guion de Pasolini, siempre desde el conocimiento de las explicaciones dadas por el mismo director publicadas en entrevistas, artículos y otros textos.

**Palabras clave:** Pier Paolo Pasolini; *Medea*; tragedia griega; tradición clásica; cine; semiología

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To Pedro Luis Cano

It is quite evident that no recreation or adaptation of *Medea* can ignore the spiritual catastrophe that the playwright and mythical tradition attributed to Euripides's protagonist. However, it would be less evident that Pasolini, in portraying her spiritual catastrophe, presented her as a "sign" (*sema*) of the modern day catastrophe if the Italian director had not explained his intentions<sup>1</sup>. Pasolini's decision to adopt the universal language of cinema was the result of his becoming increasingly mistrustful of "speech" (*lógos*), that is, of the efficacy and suitability of verbal language, while gestures, rituals and dream fantasies increasingly seduced him<sup>2</sup>. The need to explain himself, paradoxically, was in part owing to the dichotomy between his disillusion with contemporary society, bourgeois, pragmatic, non-sacred, and his enthusiasm for all that is primitive, barbarian, sacred, pre-grammatical or pre-rational. Informed by this enthusiasm, his cinema consciously avoids "verbal discourse and... literariness... Pasolini's films are... to be watched... anti-literary... they develop an original dramaturgy that freely rewrites the dramatic art of the Greek models, in which words do not play a dominant role but cooperate with all the other codes: sounds, images, gestures, music, costumes"<sup>3</sup>.

Pasolini's *Medea* (1969)<sup>4</sup> clearly illustrates this approach to cinema, and one could well question whether the film is within the intellectual grasp of the common viewer or only of the elite<sup>5</sup>. Pasolini admitted that he had made elitist, nostalgic<sup>6</sup>,

1. "*Medea* does not succeed in providing analogical links between its diegetic world and contemporary social reality. Pasolini intended to use the past as a metaphor for the present, but there is nothing in the film which prompts the viewer to pursue this metaphorical lead. Only intellectual abstraction and familiarity with his intentions allow the viewer to see in Jason and Medea two metaphors for the present" (VIANO 1993: 242).
2. On Pasolini's biography and artistic career, see, e.g.: CECCATTY (2005); NALDINI (2000 and 1989); RINALDI (1982) and SICILIANO (1978). On criticism and interpretation: ANNOVI (2017).
3. "verbosità e... letterarietà... i film pasoliniani sono... visivi e... antiletterari... sviluppano una dramaturgia originale, che riscrive liberamente quella dei modelli greci, e in cui la parola non gioca un ruolo dominante, ma coopera con tutti gli altri codici: suono, immagine, gesto, musica, costumi" (FUSILLO 1998: 13-14). The translations into English of all the non-English quotations are mine.
4. Director: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI; script: P. P. PASOLINI, based on the eponymous tragedy by Euripides; scenography: DANTE FERRETTI; costume: PIERO TOSI; music: P. P. PASOLINI in association with ELSA MORANTE; film editor: NINO BARAGLI; sound: CARLO TARCHI; production: FRANCO ROSELLINI (Roma) / Les Films Number One (Paris) / Janus Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt); distribution: Euro International Films; Italy-France-RTF; 118'.
5. On Pasolini's intellectual, philosophical and political side, see e.g.: PASOLINI (2015); RICORDI (2013); BRISOLIN (2011); MARTINELLI (2010).
6. "When the film appeared, at the beginning of 1970, the usual comments could be heard from the political left: 'Why does Pasolini always turn back to the past?', 'Why does he not look more forward?', 'Has he become a reactionary nostalgic?'. And also: 'What is the practical use of such a film?', 'What is the use of such an aesthetic art for the working class?'. Edoardo Sanguineti: 'Pasolini has always been a posthumous writer (and a director), from the very beginning'" ("Quando il film uscì, all'inizio del 1970, da sinistra si levarono le solite voci: 'Ma perché Pasolini si volge sempre al passato?', 'Perché non guarda più in avanti?', 'È forse diventato un nostalgico reazionario?'. E

to some anti-democratic and aristocratic films; although, in opposing mass culture –to him the most anti-democratic attribute– they probably became futile, albeit idealist, democratic acts. Nevertheless, when an interviewer asked him: “Do you think that *Medea* can be understood by this elite?”, he answered: “Certainly, since the attention I demand of the viewer must be as great as my effort in making it. That is to say, I do not want to presuppose an absent-minded viewer. If a viewer is absent-minded, that is their problem”<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, one might think that precisely because he wanted to avoid any absence of mindfulness, he opted for a sort of cinema which reproduced reality, free from sophisticated interpretations –for instance, by filming in Turkish Cappadocia to reproduce the Colchis of Euripides’s *Medea*–<sup>8</sup> but the truth is that Pasolini surrenders to the semiological power of reality itself, for him an inexhaustible source of signs demanding precisely that we pay close attention and make a serious effort to interpret them. “Reality is a language... this means that our gestures, expressions, actions or words are signs for those who interpret them”<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, Pasolini’s films address the viewers directly through the reality or action portrayed on the screen and, given that cinema is “the written language of action”<sup>10</sup>, “the semiology of cinema presupposes the semiology of reality”<sup>11</sup>. This language is demanding, that is, it asks for a watchful intellect not given to idleness, but it guarantees at the same time that any confusion that might result will not be

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ancora: ‘Qual’ è l’utilità pratica di un film del genere?’, ‘Che cosa può farsene la classe operaia di un’arte così estetizzante?’. Edoardo Sanguineti: ‘Pasolini è sempre stato uno scrittore (e un regista) postumo, fin dal primo istante’” –BALDONI 2010: 71). See, also: PONZI (2013).

7. “¿Piensa que *Medea* puede ser entendida por esta élite...? Ciertamente, con dificultad, porque yo pido al espectador tanta atención cuanta ha sido mi fatiga para hacer la película. O sea, no quiero presuponer un espectador distraído. Si está distraído, peor para él” –summary of an interview televised and published in *Paese Sera*, 29th January 1970, quoted by GONZÁLEZ (1997: 166).
8. However, there are more important reasons to do it: “In my historical films I never had the ambition to represent a time that no longer exists: if I intended to, I did it by means of analogy, that is, representing a modern time in some way analogical to the past. There are still places in the Third World where human beings are sacrificed: and there are tragedies of a person of the Third World who fails to adjust to the modern world: and it is this past remaining in the present that can be objectively represented... the past becomes a metaphor for the present: in a complex relation because the present is the figured integration of the past” (“Nei miei film storici io non ho mai avuto l’ambizione di rappresentare un tempo che non c’è più: se ho tentato di farlo, l’ho fatto attraverso l’analogia, cioè rappresentando un tempo moderno in qualche modo analogo a quello passato. Ci sono ancora dei luoghi del Terzo Mondo dove si fanno dei sacrifici umani: e ci sono tragedie dell’inadattabilità di una persona del Terzo Mondo al mondo moderno: è questo persistere del passato nel presente che si può rappresentare oggettivamente... il passato diviene una metafora del presente: in un rapporto complesso, perché il presente è l’integrazione figurale del passato” –quoted by DE GIUSTI (1979: 82) and extracted from “The feeling of the History” (“Il sentimento della storia”), *Cinema Nuovo*, n° 205, 1970).
9. “La realidad es un lenguaje... Esto significa que nuestros gestos, expresiones, acciones o palabras son signos para alguien que los interpreta” (MARINELLO 1999: 32).
10. On Pasolini as cinema director, see e.g.: MARASCHIN (2014); D’ASCIA (2012); CAMINATI (2010); SUBINI (2007); CHERUBINI (2005); MICCICHÉ (1999); SPILA (1999); ROHDIE (1995); GREENE (1990); BERGALA (1981) and STACK (1969: chapter 11).
11. “la lengua escrita de la acción... la semiología del cine presupone la semiología de la realidad” (FANTUZZI 1978: 21).

owing to a failure to understand the cryptic message of an imaginative artist, but rather to having lost the habit of reading Life with the aid of the rich vocabulary of signs it transmits: "I have arrived at the conclusion that cinema, in reproducing reality, describes it perfectly, and the system of signs of cinema is, in fact, identical to the system of signs of reality. Therefore, reality is a language!... But, if reality speaks, who is the one that speaks and to whom does it speak?"<sup>12</sup>.

For my part, I would like to be an attentive rather than an absent-minded viewer of Pasolini's *Medea*; I would like it to speak to me; I would like to be a good receiver and interpreter of its rich world of signs; I would like to understand the ancient reality that Pasolini sought and filmed, and by analogy our contemporary reality; I would like to be able to identify the reflections that he seemed to want to induce us to make, and to apply them, should the occasion arise, to events that were unknown to him; in sum, I would like to be worthy of the attention of the readers of this article if they should agree to accompany me in analysing the semiological universe into which Pasolini turned one of the most touching and disturbing myths of the Greek tradition<sup>13</sup>.

The personal catastrophe of Medea (Maria Callas) begins when Jason (Giuseppe Gentile) irrupts into her life, and thus Pasolini acquaints us with his genealogy while narrating the starting point of his ethical degradation. To summarize the only inevitably long "speech" (*lógos*) in the film: we see the Centaur (Laurent Terzieff) explaining to a five-years-old Jason that it all started because of a ram with golden

12. "He llegado a la conclusión de que el cine, al reproducirla, realiza una perfecta descripción de la realidad; y que el sistema de signos del cine es, en la práctica, el mismo sistema de signos de la realidad. ¡Por lo tanto, la realidad es un lenguaje!... Ahora bien, si la realidad habla, ¿quién es el que habla y con quién habla?" (quoted by FANTUZZI 1978: 155, and extracted from an interview by Peter Dragadze). Furthermore, as a result of a study of the means used by cinema to reproduce reality, Pasolini stated that this reality is natural cinema so that it can be considered the main human language. However, on Pasolini's thought in this respect and in comparison with his critics, above all Christian Metz, see. e.g.: "The written language of action" ("La lingua scritta dell'azione") in *Nuovi argomenti* (Roma), n° 2, aprile-giugno 1966, later published in *Empirismo Eretico* (Milano: Garzanti: 1972; PASOLINI (2005a).
13. Pasolini's works are usually seen as the consequence of the recovery of mythology at the end of fifties and the beginning of sixties, and one mentions the tradition of the German Romanticism –the essays about myth and word by the philologist W. F. Otto, who quotes Schelling and Hölderlin, and the tradition of linguistics and semiology –R. Barthes. *Mythologies* (1957); Lévi-Strauss. *Mythologiques* and M. Eliade. *Le mythe et le sacré*, at the beginning of sixties. See e.g.: MARINIELLO (1999: 142-144): "Pasolini's reflection on myth... follows the romantic tradition and Heidegger... According to Heidegger's school, to define the myth as a thought, as a worldview, means not to have understood that myth is not a work of the mind whose goal is both the world and existence. The myth rather precedes any thought... it guides and determines it. In order to conceive the myth it is necessary... to abandon the schemes of modern thought. Pasolini seems to accept the challenge, and cinema is the means that permits him to maintain it" ("La reflexión de Pasolini sobre el mito se sitúa... tras los pasos de la tradición romántica y heideggeriana... Según la escuela heideggeriana, definir el mito como mentalidad, como visión del mundo, significa no haber entendido que el mito no es una obra del pensamiento que tiene como objeto el mundo y la existencia. Éste precede más bien a cualquier pensamiento... lo orienta y lo determina. Para concebir el mito hace falta... salir de los esquemas del pensamiento moderno. Pasolini parece asumir este desafío y el cine constituye el medio que hace posible mantenerlo"). See also FABRO (2006).

fleece that Hermes gave to Nephele. Phrixus, her son, pursued by Ino, second wife of Athamas –who was Aeolus's son and Jason's father– was taken by the ram to Ea and delivered to King Aeëtes, who in turn sacrificed him to Zeus as a sign of gratitude. The golden fleece of the sacrificed ram brought good fortune to the kings because it guaranteed a long and peaceful reign. Aeolus's descendants, including Athamas, king of Iolcus, a town close to Ea rich with sheep and grain, wanted to get the fleece back but did not succeed. Jason's uncle, Pelias (Paul Jabara), imprisoned his brother Athamas and usurped the throne. Since then, the Centaur has kept Jason safe: "it's a rather complicated story", he says, "because it's made of things and not of thoughts" – scenes 5 and 6<sup>14</sup>.

In these scenes, the Centaur lives with Jason, still a child, in Iolcus, a land of lakes, although he speaks to him as if he could foresee the adult Jason, selfish, rational and calculating, who objectifies things, thinking about them in order to alter them to suit his own interest. The men of ancient times, on the contrary – although Jason will never behave in this way– act<sup>15</sup>, make things, because they are a part of a sole and everlasting being the Greeks call "Nature" (*Phýsis*) because it comes into being spontaneously (*phýō*), self-made, independent of any alien or prior design. For the time being, *lógos* predominates over semiology, but the sign –which is also a warning– has also been sent out: in order to understand this story that has only just begun, viewers will have to review their *modus cogitandi*. And here is the proof: the Centaur speaks now to an adolescent Jason and transfers to him a centuries-old wisdom that contemporary society in the so called First World neither understands nor recalls:

Everything's sacred, everything's sacred, everything's sacred. Nothing is natural in nature, my boy, bear it in mind. When nature seems natural to you, it'll be the end –and something different will start. Good-bye, sky, good-bye, sea! What a beautiful sky! Close, happy! Tell me: do you think that even a little piece is non-natural, non-possessioned by a god? And so is the sea, on this day when you are thirteen and are fishing with your feet in the lukewarm water. Look behind you! What do you see? Something natural? No, what you see behind you is an apparition like clouds reflected in the still, leaden water at three in the afternoon! Look at that streak on

14. "... è una storia complicata, perché è fatta di cose e non di pensieri". All the quotations in Italian are from Garzanti's edition of *Medea* (PASOLINI 1991).
15. "The man inserted in life, in the flow of pure action, constantly deciphers the language of Reality: the barbarian confronting a beast faces a sign of this language: if it is an eatable beast, he kills it, if it is a savage one, he escapes, etc. To eat, to escape are other signs of this language. To live is... to become evident through the *prāgma*: and this becoming evident is but a moment of reality talking to itself about existence. Indeed, the eaten beast and the barbarian who eats it are a part of the whole body of the Existent and the Real, physically, without interruption" ("El hombre inserto en la vida, en el giro de la pura acción, descifra continuamente el lenguaje de la Realidad: el bárbaro frente a la bestia está frente a un signo de ese lenguaje: si es una bestia comestible la mata, si es feroz, huye, etc. El comer, el huir, son otros signos de ese lenguaje. Vivir es... un manifestarse a través del *prāgma*: y esa manifestación no es más que un momento de monólogo que la realidad realiza consigo misma acerca de la existencia. En efecto, tanto la bestia comida cuanto el bárbaro que la come forman parte del cuerpo total de lo Existente o de lo Real, físicamente sin solución de continuidad" –PASOLINI 2005b: 393).

the sea, bright and pink like oil. The shadows of the trees and the reeds. Everywhere your eyes are looking, a God is hidden! And, if he isn't, He's left the hints of his sacred presence, or the silence, or the smell of grass or the chill of fresh water... Yes; everything's sacred, but sanctity is also a curse. While the gods love, they also hate –scene 7, pages 544-545<sup>16</sup>.

This speech (*lógos*) by the Centaur and the signs sent out by the lacustrine realm where he lives with Jason take us back to a period previous to rational man *stricto sensu*, who is sufficiently distant from nature to be able to objectify it, to create its name and the adjectives that refer to it, to certify the naturalness of everything surrounding him and thus to understand it as something different from himself. To ancient man, however, neither the name nor the adjectives make any sense, that is, in the terms of our *modus cogitandi*, nothing –including human beings– has yet ceased to be, absolutely but paradoxically, “non-natural”<sup>17</sup>. Everything is, without origin, without cause, without any creative Principle, or with words belonging to a now lost religious awareness and feeling, everything is “sacred”<sup>18</sup>, everything prevails and lives as a result of its divine power, everything is a total “hierophany” and, therefore, nothing –again including human beings– is hierarchically distant from the rest. Here we find ourselves, then, very far from that great man of the well-known chorus in Sophocles's *Antigone*<sup>19</sup>, a man truly superior to something already named Nature, thus dominating it and considering himself so different

16. “Tutto è santo, tutto è santo, tutto è santo. Non c'è niente di naturale nella natura, ragazzo mio, tienetelo bene in mente. Quando la natura ti sembrerà naturale, tutto sarà finito –e comincerà qualcos'altro. Addio cielo, addio mare! Che bel cielo! Vicino, felice! Di', ti sembra che un pezzetto solo non sia innaturale? Non sia posseduto da un Dio? E così è il mare, in questo giorno in cui tu hai tredici anni, e peschi con i piedi nell'acqua tiepida. Guardati alle spalle! Che cosa vedi? È forse qualcosa di naturale? No, è un'apparizione, quella che tu vedi alle tue spalle, con le nuvole che si specchiano nell'acqua ferma e pesante delle tre del pomeriggio!... Guarda laggiù... quella striscia nera sul mare lucido e rosa come l'olio. E quelle ombre di alberi... quei canneti... In ogni punto in cui i tuoi occhi guardano, è nascosto un Dio! E se per caso non c'è, ha lasciato lì i segni della sua presenza sacra, o silenzio, o odore di erba o fresco di acque dolci... Eh sì, tutto è santo, ma la santità è insieme una maledizione. Gli dei che amano –nel tempi stesso– odiano”. That everything must be attributed to gods, either fortune or misfortune, is certainly a Greek idea; see, for example: Archilochus, (WEST 1989: fr. 130), an idea to be found throughout the archaic period, which already comes from Homer (*cfr.*, for instance: *Il.* XXIV, 527 and the following pages).
17. An expression that he believed to have invented but, later on, he finds it in the *History of Religions* by Mircea Eliade. In any case, interviewed by Duflot, he says: “The characteristic of peasant civilizations and, therefore, sacred civilizations, is not to find nature natural... I realize that this nostalgia I feel for the idealized sacred and that perhaps it never existed –because the sacred has always been institutionalized from the beginning, for instance through the shamans, following the priests-, I realize that this nostalgia is rather wrong, irrational and traditionalist” (“La característica de las civilizaciones campesinas, de las civilizaciones sagradas por tanto, es no encontrar la naturaleza natural... me doy cuenta de que esta nostalgia que tengo por lo sagrado idealizado y que acaso nunca ha existido –debido a que lo sagrado siempre ha sido objeto de una institucionalización al principio, por ejemplo, a través de los chamanes, luego de los sacerdotes-, que esta nostalgia tiene algo de equivocado, de irracional, de tradicionalista” –DUFLOT 1971: 100-101).
18. On the sacred in Pasolini's works, see, e.g: BENINI (2015); GALLO & FELICE (2014); CONTI (1994); COLLEEN (1999).
19. Verses 332-375 (LLOYD-WILSON 1990).

from it that he can practise non-naturality. No, there cannot be anything natural in this ancient and lacustrine realm, because all its beings live a sole Reality which cannot be divided into parts, some of them more natural than others. Moreover, this Reality being Everything, God, being everywhere, is also the origin of both human happiness and misfortune, that is, at once He loves us and hates us. Such is Life for ancient man, such is Reality, and Pasolini wants to present it to the world not only as a hierophany, but also as an uninterrupted “hierosemia”:

... if I had to do a semiology of cinema, in fact I would do more or less the same semiology as if I had to do a semiology of reality... for me reality is a hierophany –sentimentally, intuitively; after having reasoned in this way, everything becomes more strange: reality is no longer a hierophany but a hierosemia, that is to say, a sacred language<sup>20</sup>.

Something is still left to be done by the Centaur –by Pasolini?<sup>21</sup>– not regarding the adolescent Jason but regarding the viewer: to apologize for having dared to mention ancient wisdoms, myths and rituals, although the rational and logical bourgeois who now view his *Medea* will have to open their minds and sharpen their sensitivity in order to understand the everyday bodily emotions of ancient man, as important as their most intimate experiences, which are probably too complex and lacking innocent poetry:

Centaur: Maybe you think that, besides being a liar, I am also too poetic. But, what can I do? For ancient man, myths and rituals are concrete experiences which are a part of his bodily and daily existence. For him, reality is such a perfect unity that the emotion he feels in the silence of a summer sky equals the most intimate experiences of modern man... You'll go to your uncle, the usurper of your throne, to reclaim your rights and, in order to eliminate you, he'll need an excuse, that is, he'll send you on a quest. To retrieve, for example, the golden fleece, and so you'll go to a distant land beyond the sea. There you'll have experiences belonging to a world which is quite far from our use of reason; their life is very realistic, as you'll see, because only he who is mythic is realistic and only he who is realistic is mythic –scenes 11 and 15, page 545<sup>22</sup>.

20. “... si tuviese que hacer una semiología del cine, en realidad haría más o menos la misma semiología que si tuviese que hacer una semiología de la realidad... para mí la realidad es una hierofanía –y lo es, digamos que sentimentalmente, intuitivamente-; después de haber hecho este razonamiento, todo es más extraño: la realidad ya no es una hierofanía, sino una hierosemia; es decir, un lenguaje sagrado”. Extracted from an interview by Giuseppe Cardillo (PASOLINI 2011: 79).
21. Let us bear in mind, for example, that the Italian translation of *Les dernières paroles d'un impie* (1981) by Jean Duflot, which brings together interviews with Pasolini from 1969 to 1975, is entitled “The Centaur's dream” (“Il sogno del centauro” –1983).
22. “Forse, oltre che bugiardo, ti sarò sembrato anche troppo poetico. Ma che vuoi, per l'uomo antico i miti ed i rituali sono esperienze concrete, che lo comprendono anche nel suo esistere corporeo e quotidiano. Per lui la realtà è una unità talmente perfetta, che l'emozione che egli prova, mettiamo, di fronte al silenzio di un cielo d'estate, equivale in tutto alla più interiore esperienza personale di un uomo moderno... Tu andrai dal tuo zio usurpatore del tuo regno a reclamare i tuoi diritti ed egli per eliminarti avrà bisogno di qualche pretesto, ti manderà a compiere qualche impresa. A riconquistare il vello d'oro per esempio, così te ne andrai in un paese lontano al di là del mare. Qui



Leaving aside the signs –those referring to the “non-natural” realm–, speech (*lógos*) continues to prevail but, all of a sudden, the Centaur now shows a human aspect, so that in my opinion he, his predictions and reflections, become a *sēma* indicating Pasolini’s great obsession, that is, to denounce a true anthropological change in the human race, now definitively surrendered to the harmful desire for possessing more and more consumer goods –most of them superfluous<sup>23</sup>– in an industrial society which prompts us to consume foolishly and elevates Consumerism to the rank of the only god worthy of being worshiped. The Centaur-Man, who realizes the degradation of those who long ago lived immersed in Life, warns Jason that his uncle’s usurping and killer instinct will lead him, Jason, to retrieve the golden fleece in a distant land –i.e. he will rob it–, thus violating the “divine religion” – scene 15- that they both practise. In effect, a definitive lesson derives from their bond (*religio*) to what is “non-natural”: the acceptance of the inevitable alternation of “death-resurrection”, that of “seeds losing their form in the earth to be reborn”, but, now –that is, in the land of his future experiences– “this definitive lesson is no longer useful... it is a distant memory that no longer affects you”, *ergo* the arrogant, the superb Man only feels bound to his greed and no longer needs God: “In fact, there’re no gods” – scene 15A<sup>24</sup>.

The personal experiences of contemporary individuals are certainly very different. Even when, overwhelmed by the stress and cacophony of our cities, they go to the country to enjoy the open landscapes, fragrance of the fields and the hues of sunset, they do so to restore themselves in order to recommence the madness of their daily existence rather than to integrate into their lives what Nature –now inevitably “natural”– offers. As Pasolini said, we have made a journey of no return and the most we can aspire to is to dig down into our personal stratigraphy –among the different strata accumulated throughout the centuries– in order to find the remains of what we once fortunately were, thus beginning a true *metánoia* or conversion. However, in our time, men and women of the First World no longer remember what they knew, and they do not understand death, for instance; rather they fear it as if it were something unnatural and alien. This is a world where they are

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farai esperienze di un modo che è ben lontano dall’uso della nostra ragione, la sua vita é molto realistica come vedrai perché solo chi è mitico è realistico e solo chi è realistico è mitico”. The Centaur turns now the tale, the myth, into words in a passage that has always been controversial. MAURIZIO (1993: 238) speaks of Pasolini’s “mythical realism” opposed to the “naturalism” and adds: “It was the Enlightenment that stripped the world of its mythical halo and reduced the entire realm of non-human reality to a state of nature to be scientifically studied and technologically mastered. In Pasolini’s terms, the philosophy of Enlightenment could be defined as reason severed from passion, pure reason. Pasolini does not reject reason per se, but a specific, mutant form of rationality which, in Adorno and Horkheimer’s seminal assessment of the dialectic of Enlightenment, goes by the name of ratio. Ratio is rational activity deprived of any moral goal and transformed into a pure instrument of domination”.

23. “Our education was: to have, to possess, to destroy” (“La educación recibida ha sido: tener, poseer, destruir”. PASOLINI 2005b, *Palabras*... 309, in the chapter entitled “We all are in danger” –“Todos estamos en peligro”–).
24. “divina religione... semi che perdono la loro forma sotto terra per poi rinascere... “ora questa lezione definitiva non serve più... un lontano ricordo che non ti riguarda più... “Infatti non c’è nessun Dio”.



the centre –radically anthropocentric, then– where nothing can be sacred because only they are worthy of being worshipped, where there are no gods because they have arrogated divinity for themselves. They have certainly become great, but they have never been so alone.

Convinced that Reality itself is a language, a system of signs revealing a cosmic structure, and that the worldview he posits should hinder or bar any opposition, Pasolini considers that the peasant world of Turkish Cappadocia and Anatolia could easily be a contemporary copy of Medea's Colchis, and thus the basis for drawing an evident analogy. He chooses a scheme of binary opposition<sup>25</sup>, clear and firm, so that now we may see the obverse of the Centaur's tragic and prophetic announcement. Words almost disappear and the viewer can contemplate and listen to the silence of an agricultural community, see how men and women, young and old, gather together before a solar disc<sup>26</sup> on the occasion of the ritual for the cyclic regeneration of Life –later called "Nature". They are very conscious that they depend on It because they are only a part of a living Whole, and they offer to It the blood of one of their boys, whose face will show the joy of having been chosen until, understandably and humanely, he will tremble before his imminent death. After the sacrifice, they scream in full exultation and take the blood and some organs of the sacrificed boy, then walk through the fields to spread this valuable regenerating sap on the grain, vines, trees and fruit. Medea, a priestess, knows – rather than recalls– the Centaur's lesson and pronounces the ritual words: "Give life to the seed and be reborn with the seed" –scene 20, page 546<sup>27</sup>. The ritual also

25. "G. Nowell-Smith (*Pasolini's Originality*, 1977) has pointed out a series of constant opposite poles in Pasolini's cinema: Present/Past; Repression/Freedom; Technology/Nature; Bourgeoisie/Peasant World (and underproletarians); Adult/Child; Father/Mother; Progress/Regression: Pasolini's works thus would all represent a desperate attempt to give coherence to the second terms" ("G. Nowell-Smith –*Pasolini's Originality*, 1977) ha fissato una serie di polarità costanti nel cinema pasoliniano: Presente/Passato; Repressione/Libertà; Tecnologia/Natura; Borghesia/Mondo contadino (e sottoproletariato); Adulto/bambino; Padre/Madre; Progresso/Regressione; tutta l'opera di Pasolini sarebbe un tentativo estremo di dare coerenza ai secondi termini" (FUSILLO 1996: 148-49). See also DE ALMEIDA (2012).
26. As it is always pointed out (see e.g.: FUSILLO 1996: 172-173), the sun and fire always connote Medea's world: leaving aside the sun presiding over the human sacrifice, there is the fire that purifies Medea when she walks up to the temple, the magic fire that in dreams burns Glaucus and Creon; the Sun who speaks to Medea; the destruction of Medea's house by means of fire; the fire that separates Medea's world and Jason's world at the end; they symbolize, then, the sacred world of Medea and her power of destruction and death.
27. "Da' vita al seme e rinasci con il seme". "This relationship between the Greek myth and the peasant world has mainly to do with the concept of cycle... Pasolini often theorizes about the cycles of the peasant world that have been absorbed and frustrated by the novelty of Christian thought, which is *per se* unilinear and non-cyclic... for a period of twelve thousand years human history and religion have been dominated by cyclic rhythms of the agricultural civilization based on the constant alternation of the beginning and the end, death and resurrection, dawn and sunset" ("Questo rapporto tra il mito greco e il mondo contadino ruota principalmente intorno al concetto di ciclicità... Pasolini teorizza più volte la ciclicità del mondo contadino, che ha assorbito e vanificato la novità del pensiero cristiano, di per sé 'unilineare' e non ciclico... per dodici millenni la storia e la religione umana sono stati dominati dai ritmi ciclici della civiltà agricola, che si basano sul continuo alternarsi di principio e fine, morte e resurrezione, alba e tramonto" –FUSILLO 1996: 20-21).

includes a simulation of the renewal of the royal family in the course of an orgiastic feast in which everybody spits in the faces of the royal participants<sup>28</sup>.

Now the viewer has seen the ritual, in fact has attended it; the interpretation of the signs is quite obvious, as are the provocation and scandal<sup>29</sup>. The filmed reproduction of the Turkish peasant life cannot include a genuine human sacrifice, but Pasolini decides to represent one, because Medea is in the end the barbarian just as for the Greeks all those who do not speak their language are barbarians. Should mankind return to this savage stage? Is man a seed that, once dead, is reborn with all of Nature<sup>30</sup>? Our contemporary world can only regard the ritual described above as cruel, but Pasolini hopes the viewer will understand that this is not selfish and calculated cruelty. On the contrary, to affirm that human beings must pay tribute to Nature simply because their lives are sustained by it (the notion of ecology only asks that we respect it) is a reasonable notion because this implies that men and women are not gods but a part of a global balance. What does this cruelty mean compared with the absolute disrespect to nature shown by the industrial society of unscrupulous capitalism or neocapitalism? What does it mean compared with the rational, calculated, anti-natural and anti-human cruelty that our civilization has practised and still practises –let us bear in mind, for instance, World Wars I and II? What does it mean compared with the wild exploitation of Nature<sup>31</sup> and the

28. "It is a rare and fascinating case of anthropological cinema filmed in Turkey among the inhabitants of Göreme" ("Si tratta di un caso raro e affascinante di cinema antropologico, girato in Turchia fra gli abitanti di Göreme" –FUSILLO 1996: 158).
29. "To scandalize is the goal of modern art according to Pasolini... But the bourgeois who see a scandalous film are divided into two categories: A select category of the intellectual elite, who for a century and a half have become immune to scandals; furthermore, it wants them in order to try to understand them, thus placating its conscience. The other category is the bourgeoisie *tout court*, which does not want to become immune to scandals and emerges from them hard-hearted and reaffirmed in its ideas" ("El objetivo del arte moderno es, según Pasolini, el de escandalizar... Ahora bien, los burgueses que asisten a la proyección de un filme escandaloso se dividen en dos categorías: Una categoría selecta de élite intelectual, que desde hace siglo y medio está vacunada contra los escándalos, más aún, los desea para intentar encajarlos, comprenderlos y liberar de este modo su conciencia. La otra categoría es la de la burguesía *tout court*, que no ha querido nunca vacunarse contra el escándalo y sale, del escándalo, endurecida y confirmada en sus ideas" –FANTUZZI 1978: 116-117).
30. Pasolini also explains it by means of the analogy of the film editing: It is necessary to die, because: "As long as we live, we have no meaning and our lives cannot be translated: a chaos of possibilities... Death makes an instant montage of our lives... it chooses their significant moments... immortality is non-moral" ("mientras estamos vivos, carecemos de sentido y el lenguaje de nuestra vida es intraducible: un caos de posibilidades... La muerte ejecuta un montaje fulminante de nuestra vida... elige sus momentos significativos... la inmortalidad es inmoral" –MARINELLO 1999: 43).
31. "Italian citizens want to consciously understand why in these last ten years of a supposed technological civilization such savage disasters –real estate, planning, landscaping and ecological disasters– have taken place, delivering the country to its fate, always in a savage way" ("Los ciudadanos italianos quieren saber conscientemente por qué en estos diez años de supuesta civilización tecnológica se han realizado desastres inmobiliarios, urbanísticos, paisajísticos y ecológicos tan salvajes, abandonando el campo a sí mismo, siempre salvajemente" –PASOLINI 2005b, *Palabras...*256, it corresponds to the chapter "Why the process?" – "¿Por qué el proceso?").

exploitation of man by man, not in the name of real progress but in the name of foolish, and unremitting development?<sup>32</sup>

The signs indicating a pre-industrial society with a true community spirit have been now sent out. And now Pasolini calls us to the palace, the centre of power, where the astute Pelias acts only in his own interest<sup>33</sup>. Jason has reclaimed his kingdom, but Pelias, as predicted by the Centaur, has discovered the way to neutralize a demand that he knows is fair:

There's a sign of everlastingness, power and order; this sign is the golden fleece of a divine ram; it's in a distant land, beyond the sea where no one has ever been. If you bring that golden fleece back to our city, I'll give back your kingdom – scene 25, page 546<sup>34</sup>.

It is well known that Power always requires signs or symbols but Pasolini expects of the viewer a further reflection: the only signs attesting to real power and authority are those resulting from our efforts and sacrifices, not from robbery. However, in Pelias's kingdom nothing is now sacred, since his mind harbours only selfish calculations, and relying on these he will lead Jason to loot and plunder. We know that the knot of tragedy demands, so to speak, that Jason fall into his uncle's trap; or we could say that this tragic knot forces him to accept the fate predicted by the Centaur, but Pasolini does not want us to see it in this way. On every side of the world's oceans, throughout the centuries, earthly Powers of every sort have committed every sort of plunder and extermination, often with the shameful excuse that their sacred mission was to civilize the barbarians –no need to cite examples ever present in our minds. Pasolini, for his part, always drew attention to the exploitation of the Third World, although he thought of the "Third World as not only the remote undeveloped countries..."<sup>35</sup> but also situations familiar to him, such as the young

32. In this respect and on Pasolini's political and social thought, see, e.g.: SAPELLI (2005); GIMÉNEZ (2003) and PASOLINI (1999).

33. GONZÁLEZ (1997): 129 points out the significant contrast between Colchis and its "strange and exaggerated clothes... accompanied by symbolic objects –zoomorphic and vegetable masks, axes... hanging mice... sun wheels..." ("ropas extrañas y exageradas... acompañadas de objetos simbólicos –máscaras zoomórficas y vegetales, hachas... ratones colgantes... ruedas solares...") and Iolcus "with the fine clothes in clear colours, white and orange, displayed by Pelias's brown daughters... Corinth maintains the lightness of the clothes and the smoothness of the pale colours... Both in Iolcus and in Corinth we are in the precincts of the royal court... regarding Medea: she and her servants, her sons and their teacher cloak themselves in heavy and dark coloured clothes" ("con las telas finas que lucen las morenas hijas de Pelias, de colores claros, blancos y anaranjados... Corinto mantiene la ligereza de las telas y la suavidad de los colores poco saturados... Tanto en Yolco como en Corinto nos movemos en los espacios de la corte real... en lo que toca a Medea: tanto ella como sus servidoras, sus hijos y el pedagogo, se cubren con ropajes pesados de colores oscuros"). He also points out the difference between the bodily typology of the first city and the other two, etc. -129-139).

34. "Esiste un segno della perennità del potere e dell'ordine, questo segno è la pelle d'oro di un caprone divino, essa si trova in una terra lontana, oltre il mare, dove nessuno è mai stato. Se tu porterai nella nostra città quella pelle d'oro io te lo restituirò, il tuo regno".

35. But not only Africa, India or the Middle East: "The fact that the Greek myths (European) and African life were analogous mirrors for him could be extended beyond Africa and Greece to Europe

underproletarians of the Roman *borgate*<sup>36</sup> (suburbs), mostly sons and daughters of emigrants from Southern Italy<sup>37</sup>.

Jason and the Argonauts, having become mere barbarians and plunderers, now arrive at civilized Colchis. They cannot conceive that the horses they encounter should remain free in the fields; on the contrary, they must possess them: “Let us take them”. But, above all, although all is sacred, they rush into the temple, rob its treasure, beat the watchman and throw him a crumb, and finally Jason mocks him by asking him to pray for them: “Here you are, pray for us” – scenes 35, 39, pages 546-547<sup>38</sup>. Interpreting the signs appears to be very simple, but let us take care because this personal language of Pasolini’s probably accepts a broad enough interpretation to open our eyes and minds to the uncountable excesses of neocapitalism and consider its defenders as thieves *stricto sensu*. Indeed, it is not absurd in my opinion to interpret the temple as an allegory of the epic and sacred life – the most valuable of their possessions<sup>39</sup> – led by the underproletarians, whose dignity has been robbed by a neocapitalism that tempts them not with a crumb, but with overproduction on such a scale that they are induced into foolish consumerism, making them believe, furthermore, that they are truly making progress<sup>40</sup>.

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generally in the past (pre-Renaissance) and to a Europe of the present in the poor areas of Southern Europe when a peasant, rural life and society were still existent. It was the point Pasolini stressed in *Il Vangelo*, setting the *Gospel* in Calabria, and also in *Edipo Re*, where he relocated Sicilians in Morocco” (ROHDIE 1995: 88).

36. See, e.g.: RHODES (2007) and SICILIANO (2005).

37. An underproletarian still heroic but doomed to disappear swallowed by a dream: “... this underproletarian residual and doomed... to disappear, represents an opposition to the colonization that in a few years would build a very different periphery, inhabited by people subjected to the center to which they went every morning, attracted by that job that gave them well-being and, therefore, that dreamlike air” (“... este subproletario residual y condenado... a la desaparición, representa una resistencia... a la colonización que en pocos años iba a construir una periferia muy diferente, habitada por unas gentes plenamente sometidas al centro hacia donde se dirigían cada mañana, atraídas por aquel trabajo que les daba el bienestar y, por consiguiente, aquel aire de sueño” (PASOLINI, 2005b, 327; it corresponds to the chapter “Pasolini’s vocabulary: ‘Accattone’” – “Léxico pasoliniano: ‘Accattone’” – and the quotation belongs to P. P. Pasolini (1992). *Petrolino*. Torino: Einaudi, 497).

38. “Prendiamoli... Tieni prega per noi”. “He contrasted the bourgeoisie (the bourgeois way of life) to religion (the religious way of life) as absolutely incompatible data in practice. The bourgeoisie means, in his opinion, addiction to possessions (to the past as tradition, to the future as a guarantee of well-being); religiousness, according to Pasolini, is precisely the opposite: it demands not being addicted to possessions” (“Oponia burguesía –modo de vida burguesa– y religión –modo religioso de vivir– como datos absolutamente incompatibles en la práctica. Burguesía quiere decir, según su manera de entenderla, apego a la posesión –el pasado como tradición, al futuro como garantía de bienestar–; la religiosidad, según Pasolini, es precisamente lo contrario: exige el desapego de lo poseído”, FANTUZZI 1978: 83).

39. “In the poor people, free of any historical conscience, Pasolini finds an epic and religious matrix... the elements in an underproletarian’s psychology... are always... pure, because they are unconscious and, therefore, essential” (“En los personajes miserables, al margen de una conciencia histórica, Pasolini reencuentra una matriz épico-religiosa... los elementos que entran en juego en la psicología de un... subproletario, son siempre... puros porque son inconscientes y, por tanto, esenciales” –FANTUZZI 1978: 66).

40. “The young underproletarians in Rome have lost ... their culture... they have been provided with a bourgeois way of life (based on consumerism): they have been destroyed in a classical sense...

According to the logic of binary opposition, Medea's behaviour must be the opposite of Jason's. She goes to temple not to rob, but to pray: "Make me ready; I want to go to temple to pray" – scene 39, page 547<sup>41</sup>. Following the customary steps of the ritual, she orders her servants to dress her with all the attributes of a priestess before walking on the hot coals of a purifying fire. However, she will also become a thief. In effect, while she is praying, Jason arrives and she faints, overcome by such a vision. She realizes that this man has come on a quest for the golden fleece and decides to help him. She kicks the offerings in the temple and consummates her sacrilege by trying to pull the fleece out of the base on which it is displayed<sup>42</sup>. She cannot do it by herself and walks to the palace to ask her brother Apsyrtus to help her<sup>43</sup>. They both finally rob the fleece, flee and meet Jason and the Argonauts. Jason understands what Medea has done and why. They all flee to the ship *Argo*. Medea knows that her father the king will pursue them, so she kills Apsyrtus and dismembers his body in order to throw the pieces along the path because she knows that the royal expedition will continually stop to perform its sacred duties regarding the mortal remains of the monarch's son, the prince, even to the extent of eventually giving up the pursuit. Medea, Jason and the Argonauts embark and set sail. The royal expedition returns with the mortal remains, and the whole community, led by the king wails in accordance with the established ritual – scenes, 46, 47 and 49, page 548.

All these images – at the same time, signs – are quite easily interpreted, but the central *sēma* turns out to be the simplest. No matter, because in fact it is quite evident that Pasolini emphasizes the indomitable power of *érōs*, thus rationalizing Medea's betrayal to her people and herself, that is, rationalizing her spiritual catastrophe, sacrilege or conversion in reverse. Even in times like ours when science has tried

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the terrible unhappiness or the criminal aggressiveness of the young proletarians and underproletarians derive precisely from the imbalance between culture and economic condition, from the impossibility of creating (except mimetically) bourgeois cultural models because of the constant poverty masked by an illusory improvement in their lives" ("Los jóvenes subproletarios romanos han perdido... su cultura... se les ha proporcionado un modo de vida burgués (consumista): han sido clásicamente destruidos... la atroz infelicidad o la agresividad criminal de los jóvenes proletarios y subproletarios se deriva precisamente del desequilibrio entre cultura y condición económica, de la imposibilidad de realizar (salvo miméticamente) modelos culturales burgueses a causa de la persistente pobreza enmascarada por una mejora ilusoria del nivel de vida" –PASOLINI 2005b. *Palabras...*: 266, in the chapter entitled "My proposals for school and television" ("Mis propuestas sobre la escuela y la televisión").

41. "Preparatemi voglio andare a pregare al tempio". On women in Greek Tragedy today, see, e.g.: WILMER (2007).
42. "Very probably the temple that guards the golden Fleece is the present hall of the Tokali Kilise – also in Gorëme-, long ago a small church with only one nave and barrel vault, decorated in the Xth century with Christian figurative images which have not been hidden in the film but rather shown with a certain delight as the backdrop" ("El templo que custodia el Vellocino es muy probablemente el actual vestíbulo de la Tokali Kilise –también en Gorëme-, en su momento pequeña iglesia de una sola nave con bóveda de cañón, decorada en el siglo X con imágenes figurativas cristianas que tampoco han sido ocultadas para la película, sino que, antes bien, son mostradas como fondo con un cierto deleite" (GONZÁLEZ 1997: 126).
43. *Cfr.* *Ov. Trist.* 3. 9. 26-34 (OWEN 1915). See also: BREMMER (1997: 83-102), in CLAUSS & JOHNSTON (1997).

to explain how we fall in love as a result of complex but identifiable chemical processes that cause attraction –and, consequently, it would be theoretically possible to have them under control– Pasolini opts for presenting *érōs* as an essential and ungovernable power that has always caused great disasters and always will<sup>44</sup>. From the point of view of a Western religious mind, it seems impossible to conceive that evil can reside, so to speak, right in the middle of good, but this *érōs*, as presented by the Italian director, is also, paradoxically, a hierophany, a natural sign of what is sacred<sup>45</sup>, and the source of great benefits –such as freeing human beings from living in isolation by inducing into them erotic enthusiasm<sup>46</sup>– but also the origin, as we have seen, of the greatest personal errors<sup>47</sup>. Medea, then, victim of a desire that overwhelms her, surrenders to a man who will never understand her decision. She feels no longer bound to his people, loses her roots, loves a plunderer, and falls into a long lethargy until, several years later in Corinth, she remembers the power that comes to her from Helios, her grandfather. Nevertheless, Medea must also be a sign of Pasolini's time, since what he considered the Third World's betrayal of itself, i.e., the adoption of an alien model and, as a consequence, the tragic loss of structures of its own –*lato sensu*– can only be explained by the fascination felt by this other plunderer called the First World, which has conquered the Third World by tempting it with an erotic form of development, that is, capable of generating desire<sup>48</sup>.

44. "For me, eroticism is first of all culture and, therefore, a ritual of the spirit. It can be proved scientifically, through Saussure and Morris, that the semiological realm harbours a language of sex... Anomy annihilates anything that obstructs the infinite desire of Eros, because Eros has a force lacking the quality of self-satisfaction. Durkheim uses... an ancient metaphor: beyond the walls of the town (the ratio) the infinite horizon unfolds; here begins the lack of moderation punished by gods. In this case, Eros avoids the human laws: Oedipus kills his mother, Medea her children. Julian, in *Porcile*, loves pigs and lets them devour him" ("Para mí, el erotismo es en primer lugar cultura, por tanto ritual del espíritu. Se puede demostrar científicamente, a través de Saussure y de Morris, que en el terreno semiológico existe un lenguaje del sexo... La anomía suprime todo lo que bloquea el deseo infinito de Eros. Porque el Eros contiene una fuerza que no posee la facultad de auto-satisfacerse. Durkheim utiliza... una antigua metáfora: pasado el muro de contención de la ciudad (la *ratio*) se abre el horizonte infinito, comienza la desmesura castigada por los dioses. En ese caso, el Eros escapa de las normas humanas. Edipo mata a su madre, Medea a sus hijos. Julián, de *Porcile*, ama los cerdos y se hace devorar por ellos" –DUFLOT 1971: 94-5). On *érōs*, desire and body in Pasolini's works, see, e.g.: GRAGNOLATI (2013); COLLEEN (2007); PARUSSA (2003) and MANTEGAZZA (1997).
45. "Medea's desire to aid Jason and flee with the Golden Fleece is not a fanciful whim but, rather, an extension of her desire for association with the divine. All her deeds (The betrayal of her people, the murder of Absirto, the poisoning of Glaucé, and, eventually, the murder of her children) serve to salvage the sacred" (RYAN-SCHUTZ 2007: 68).
46. We only need to think, for example, of the different speeches of the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus* by Plato (BURNET 1901 rpr. 1991), and of the *Eroticus* by Plutarch (FLACELIÈRE 1980).
47. Medea acts guided by her passion and some commentators point out that for Pasolini passion is a repository of innocence: "For him, passion is a value and everything said or done passionately is free from any moral judgement... passion is his amulet, his sign of recognition, his inexhaustible deposit of innocence" ("Para él, la pasión es un valor y todo lo que se dice y hace apasionadamente está por definición exento de juicio moral... la pasión es su amuleto, su signo de reconocimiento, su inagotable depósito de inocencia") –MARESCA (2006: 31), it corresponds to the chapter "Pasolini, Style and Truth" ("Pasolini, Estilo y Verdad", by Alfonso Berardinelli).
48. "His lucidity... prevented him from not realizing... the fascination that in their turn the young Africans felt for the products and the way of life of their colonizers, a clear sign for him that also the



From this point of view, everything in *Medea* is the result of the sacred experience of *érōs*, since, even after *Medea*'s sacrilege, when she, Jason and the Argonauts have disembarked, she still remembers what must be done and finds herself terrified by what she has lost:

This place will sink because it has no support! Ah! You don't pray to God so that He blesses your tents! You don't repeat God's first act... you don't search for the centre. No! Find a tree, a staff, a stone! Ah! Earth, talk to me, make me hear your voice! I no longer recall your voice! Sun, talk to me! Where's the place from which I can hear your voice? Earth, talk to me; sun, talk to me. Perhaps you're getting lost in order to not ever return? I no longer hear what you say! You, grass, talk to me! You, stone, talk to me! Where is your sense, earth? Where can I find you again? Where's the bond that joined you to the sun? I touch the earth with my feet and I don't recognize it! I look at the sun with my eyes and I don't recognize it! – scene 57, pages 548-49<sup>49</sup>.

Hearing these words and seeing her running completely amok on a wasteland stirs poignant feelings, and, accustomed to the practice of drawing analogies to which we have been urged again and again –unless we have been inattentive– we may also find ourselves terrified by the anthropological change discussed above and by having made a journey of no return<sup>50</sup>. We are, according to Pasolini, rootless beings who have lost the bonds to the Earth on which we depend, the Earth that taught and gave us all. But now the ancient and real dialogue has broken down and neither earth, nor sun, nor grass, can speak to us. Apparently safe and protected in our cities, overprovided by the enormous production of our industrial societies, we

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Third World was doomed sooner or later to capitalist industrialization" ("Su lucidez... le impedía no darse cuenta... de la fascinación que a su vez sentían los jóvenes africanos por los productos y el modo de vida de sus colonizadores, un síntoma inequívoco para él de que también el tercer Mundo estaba a la larga condenado a la industrialización capitalista" –PASOLINI 2005b. *Palabras...*: 342, in the chapter "Pasolini's vocabulary: 'Third World'" ("Léxico pasoliniano: 'Tercer Mundo'", by Mariano Maresca and Juan Ignacio Mendiguchia).

49. "Questo luogo sprofonderà perché è senza sostegno! Aaaaah! Non pregate Dio, perché benedica le vostre tende! Non ripetete il primo atto di Dio... Voi non cercate il centro... non segnatelo il centro. No! cercate un albero, un palo, una pietra! Aaaa! Aaaa! Parlatemi, terra, fammi sentire la tua voce! Non ricordo più la tua voce! Parlatemi sole! Dov'è il punto dove posso ascoltare la vostra voce? Parlatemi, terra, parlatemi, sole. Forse vi state perdendo per non tornare più? Non sento più quello che dite! Tu erba, parlatemi! Tu pietra, parlatemi! Dov'è il tuo senso, terra? Dove ti ritrovo? Dov'è il legame che ti legava al sole? Tocco la terra coi piedi e non la riconosco! Guardo il sole con gli occhi, e non lo riconosco!". See, e.g.: FEDERICCI-NEBIOSI (2006).
50. Africa and Asia were seen as the repository of the lives of ancient men and women: "Pasolini was not only interested in those Third World islands of the developed world. Africa and Asia, above all, were for him the escape and the search, the escape from this post-historic world to which he felt he did not belong and the search for cultures still free from the Western anthropological catastrophe..." ("A Pasolini no le interesaban sólo estas islas tercermundistas del mundo desarrollado. África y Asia, sobre todo, fueron para él lugar de huida y búsqueda, huida de ese mundo posthistórico al que no sentía pertenecer y búsqueda de culturas aún salvadas de la catástrofe antropológica acaecida en Occidente...") –PASOLINI (2005b: 341), in the chapter entitled "Pasolini's vocabulary: Third World" ("Léxico pasoliniano: 'Tercer Mundo'", by Mariano Maresca and Juan Ignacio Mendiguchia).



believe that we have and control everything, but the support does not hold and we can sink –we certainly have– just as Medea believes will happen if those men do not search for a centre, a staff or a stone<sup>51</sup>. Throughout the world an arrogant anthropophany of men and women who have given in to consumerism prevails, and they no longer notice that the ancient religious feeling made them more humble and aware of being a part of a Whole which, as a basis and support, asks them to refrain from abuse and demands filial cooperation.

Now Jason returns to the palace with the golden fleece on his shoulders, accompanied by Medea. He can now reclaim his kingdom, but Pelias has prepared for him an “unexpected experience”, that is, “to understand that kings are not always obliged to keep their promises”<sup>52</sup>. However, Jason’s answer is still more unexpected:

Jason: Well, I understand, I give up, here it is. Keep your golden fleece, the sign of the eternity of power and order! My quest has served me at least to understand that the world is larger than your kingdom... And, moreover, if you want, I’ll tell you what’s true in my opinion: this golden fleece, remote from its country, has no meaning at all – scene 59, page 549<sup>53</sup>.

Very probably, the representation of the myth will lead viewers to cast their minds back to a remote past, but these images have been filmed in order to make the viewers understand by analogy that Pelias’s ethical degradation resembles the contemporary situation. Words –and, needless to say, promises– in the times when everything was sacred, can only be vehicles for truth, but Pelias –like all the Peliases in the world!– does not keep his word and no one can trust him in spite of his rank in a kingdom ruled –but only apparently– by reason and law. Pasolini invites us to reflect on the true spiritual catastrophe marked by the passage from a time when it was enough to give one’s word to another marked by ethical decline –rather than ethical advance– when words must be certified by a notary and we are provided with all the criminal and procedural mechanisms to punish the frequent failures to keep them. This change might seem a further step towards civilization –even an emblem of it– but, in fact, it is a step backwards with serious consequences.

51. “Here the influence of the essay by Eliade is also perceptible (*Traité d’histoire des religions*), and of the chapter devoted to “The sacred space: temple, palace, Centre of the World”... Medea searches for the “sacred” –that she has abandoned in Colchis–, whose feeling has suddenly disappeared with the bodily apparition of Jason, right in the Centre, in the Omphalos where the Golden Fleece was kept” (“Anche qui si risente l’influsso del Trattato di Eliade (*Traité d’histoire des religions*), e del capitolo dedicato a “Lo spazio sacro: tempio, palazzo, Centro del Mondo”... Medea cerca il ‘sacro’ che ha abbandonato nella Colchide, e il cui sentimento è cessato di colpo con l’apparizione ‘carnale’ di Giasone, proprio nel Centro, nell’Omphalos in cui era custodito il Vello d’oro”), FUSILLO (1996: 168).
52. “esperienza inaspettata... “comprendere che i re non sempre sono obbligati a mantenere le loro promesse”).
53. “Bene, ho capito, cedo, ecco qua. Tieniti il tuo vello, segno della perennità del potere e dell’ordine! La mia impresa mi è servita almeno a capire che il mondo è più grande del tuo regno... E poi, se vuoi che ti dica quello che secondo me è la verità, questa pelle di caprone, lontano dal suo paese, non ha più alcun significato”.

On the other hand, this is the only ethical Jason in the script, capable of renouncing the golden fleece –and, therefore, power– and broadening his mind to fit a wide world, even clever enough to realize that the fleece, distant from its country, is worthless and has no meaning. This Jason is the man who, according to some mythical sources, far from Iolcus and welcomed in Corinth, lives happily for ten years with Medea and their two children until his greed reawakens, then considers the benefits of marrying Glauce (Margareth Clementi), the king's daughter, and decides to break his bond to Medea, a sacred one –as we have seen– because it was based upon an essential power: *érōs*.

And, since Pasolini compels us to be interpreters of signs, why should we not bring to mind all the historical spoils of alien treasures, material, cultural, or whatever they may be –as well as the museums or containers *lato sensu*– in which they are displayed; the plunderers have thought of the immediate benefit but have not broadened their minds or understood that those spoils often had for the owners a religious meaning not transferable. In any case, given Pasolini's radical rejection of the foolish consumerism of our contemporary society, I cannot help thinking about the propensity of this society to adopt fashions, customs, eating habits, and other behaviour clearly alien to it, even as it is responsible for terminating a centuries-old balance in favour of a uniformity that pre-empt any alternative<sup>54</sup>. However, things are still worse when it is the Third World which adopts behaviours from the First World or when this adoption is imposed, tragically disrupting the existing structures and traditions.

Jason says good-bye to the Argonauts –scene 69, page 549– and we already then see him in Corinth<sup>55</sup> some years later, far from Medea and about to make a

54. "The Italians also want to know... what is the new mode of production and how it is defined... and if... for the first time in history it will not create unchangeable social relations, that is, removed from and denied –once and forever– any form of otherness" ("Los italianos quieren saber también... qué es y cómo se define el nuevo modo de producción... y si... no producirá por vez primera en la historia relaciones sociales inmodificables, es decir, sustraídas y negadas, de una vez para siempre, a cualquier forma de alteridad" –PASOLINI (2005b). *Palabras...*: 258, in the chapter entitled "Why the process?" ("¿Por qué el proceso?"). "... the hedonistic and pragmatic consumerism, which satiates itself in a technical and purely earthy World, whose nature consists of the cycle of production and consumerism... with a uniform way of life in accordance with the dictates of a capitalist or neocapitalist economy and powers, expands an irresistible consumer dissatisfaction. And so absolutely dominates the aspirations of not only those who are... the support of that society but also of those who are its victims" ("... el consumo hedonístico y pragmático, que se agota en un universo tecnocrático y puramente terreno, cuya naturaleza consiste en el ciclo de la producción y del consumo... con un modo de vida uniformizado según las direcciones de una economía y unos poderes capitalistas o neocapitalistas, propaga una irresistible insaciabilidad consumista. Y así domina absolutamente las aspiraciones no sólo de aquellos que son... el apoyo de esa sociedad, sino a la vez de aquellos que son las víctimas de la misma" –MONCLÚS 1976: 59).

55. The wall scenes are filmed in the Syrian town of Alep and those in the middle of the town in the Piazza dei Miracoli of Pisa (FUSILLO 1996: 19). GONZÁLEZ (1997: 125-27) points out that the geometric Piazza dei Miracoli represents "an archaic but refined realm where life and power are no longer ruled by the sacred, as they were in Colchis; it rather seems that the sacred has been there substituted by power itself and its force" ("un ámbito arcaico, pero refinado, donde la vida y el poder no están ya regidos por lo sacro, como sucedía en la Cólquide; más bien da la impresión de

great discovery thanks to the simultaneous presence of two Centaurs. At the very beginning of this analysis, I said that Pasolini often felt the need to explain himself and, with regard to what must be discussed now, Jean Dufлот, in the course of a long interview, asked him precisely for some necessary explanations<sup>56</sup>. However, we must attend first to one of the most significant dialogues of the script:

C: Jason, Jason. J: Why are you here?... The voice of the Centaur: You mean: why are you both here? J: Is this a vision? C: If so, you're causing it. We both are in fact inside you. J: But I only knew one centaur. C: No! You knew two: a sacred one when you were a child, and a desecrated one when you became an adult. And here we are, one close to the other. J: But what is the purpose of the old centaur I knew when I was a child and who, if I have properly understood, has been replaced by you without making him disappear? C: He doesn't speak, of course, because his logic is so different from ours that we wouldn't be able to understand it... But I can speak for him. It's under his sign that –beyond your calculations and your interpretation– you really love Medea'. J: Do I love Medea? C: Yes, you do and, moreover, you pity her and understand... her spiritual catastrophe, her disorientation as an ancient woman in a world that ignores all she has ever believed in... she, poor woman, has experienced a conversion in reverse and has not recovered since then. J: And how does knowing this help me? C: It doesn't. It's reality. J: And why are you telling me this then? C: Because nothing could prevent the old Centaur from inspiring feelings and me, the new Centaur, from expressing them – scene 69.1, pages 550-551<sup>57</sup>.

Pasolini explained himself, but in fact the dialogue between Jason and the new Centaur is not so enigmatic in my opinion if we bear in mind that the director simply asks the viewer to take into account his intellectual vision of contemporary men and women. Dufлот speaks of dualism but Pasolini corrects him. There is neither dualism nor a personality divided into two; the presence of the two centaurs, a sign obviously to be interpreted, “means that what is sacred, once it is no longer so, does not disappear at all. The sacred human being continues to be

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que lo sagrado haya sido allí sustituido por el mismo poder y su fuerza”). Anyway, for everything related to the geographical locations, see, e.g.: MANCINI (1982: 387) and the following.

56. DUFLOT (1971: 91).

57. “C: Giasone, Giasone. J : Come mai sei qui?... Voce Centauro: Vuoi dire come mai siamo qui? J: È una visione? C: Se lo è, sei tu che la produci. Noi due siamo infatti dentro di te. J: Ma io ho conosciuto un solo Centauro. C: No! Ne hai conosciuti due: uno sacro, quando eri bambino, uno consacrato, quando sei diventato adulto. Ma ciò che è sacro si conserva accanto alla sua nuova forma sconsacrata. Ed eccoci qua, uno accanto all'altro! J: Ma qual è la funzione del vecchio Centauro, quello che ho conosciuto da bambino, e che tu, Centauro Nuovo, se ho ben capito, hai sostituito, non facendolo scomparire, ma sostituendoti a lui? C: Esso non parla, naturalmente, perché la sua logica è così diversa dalla nostra, che non si potrebbe intendere... Ma posso parlare io, per lui. È sotto il suo segno che tu –al di fuori dei tuoi calcoli e della tua interpretazione- in realtà ami Medea. J: Io amo Medea? C: Sì. E inoltre hai pietà di lei, e comprendi la sua ... catastrofe spirituale, il suo disorientamento di donna antica in un mondo che ignora ciò in cui lei ha sempre creduto... la poverina ha avuto una conversione alla rovescia, e non si è più ripresa.... J: E a che mi serve sapere tutto ciò? C: A nulla. È la realtà. J: E tu per quale ragione me lo dici? C: Perché nulla potrebbe impedire al vecchio Centauro di ispirare dei sentimenti e a me, nuovo Centauro, di esprimerli”.

juxtaposed with the non-sacred one”. We all change throughout our lives, but “what we were before the changes, this loss of our sacred nature, this evolution, has not disappeared”<sup>58</sup>. Consequently, as I noted above, Pasolini’s non-Hegelian vision of contemporary men and women<sup>59</sup> implies considering them as if he was a geologist expert in stratigraphy, accustomed to identifying the strata superposed throughout the human sedimentation<sup>60</sup>. Nevertheless, he is only interested in denouncing the most recent anthropological change, which, in a calculated simplification, he associates with the passage from a peasant society to an industrial society that has acquiesced to irrational consumerism. Here he is transforming the myth of Medea into images and, given the non-temporary nature of this singular language –often seen as an antiquated language– he can present the peasant society as a community of pre-grammatical and pre-logical sacred human beings who feel emotions rather than think. If Jason dug deep into his personality and found that noble and deep stratum, he would be able to understand that long ago he felt a deep emotion because of Medea’s act. In effect, she suffered an ethical overturning (*katastrophē*), she gave up being sacred to the extent of experiencing a conversion in reverse. It is quite evident, however, that Jason does not want to become a geologist expert in stratigraphy and, therefore, to open his mind to this reality would not help him at all, although the new Centaur –that is, Pasolini disappointed with contemporary men and women– insists on his right to express it<sup>61</sup>. And, finally, what will be the viewers’ calculations and interpretations? Will they accept Pasolini’s thesis? Will they at least take it into account? Will they think that it does not help them at all? Do we still retain any stratum of our ancient and almost lost sacred nature? Is Western society aware of its responsibility for the spiritual catastrophe of the Third World? Is the Third World aware of its conversion in reverse?

Let us go on: Medea, who lives at the foot of the citadel of Corinth, walks up there although this is prohibited. She sees Jason dancing with some boys, a sign

58. “significa que la cosa sagrada, una vez desacralizada, no desaparece en absoluto. El ser sagrado sigue yuxtapuesto al ser desacralizado... pero lo que yo era antes de esos cambios, esas desacralizaciones, esas evoluciones, no ha desaparecido”.

59. “The sacred and the profane continue to exist side by side. I am not a Hegelian; there is indeed a thesis, the sacred, and an antithesis, the profane, but there is no synthesis, only juxtaposition” (Pasolini quoted by COSTA 1977: 68).

60. “I am so metaphysical, so mythical and so mythological that I do not dare to say that the datum following a previous one is dialectically incorporated and assimilated by me. I say that both are juxtaposed... I am a historicist... I understand that History is evolution, a constant overcoming of data, but I also know that these data are never destroyed, they are permanent. Perhaps it is irrational, but it is so” (“Soy tan metafísico, mítico y mitológico que no me atrevo a decir que el dato que sigue a otro previo lo incorpore dialécticamente y lo asimile. Digo que ambos se yuxtaponen... soy historicista... comprendo que la historia es una evolución, una superación continua de datos, pero sé también que esos datos nunca son destruidos, son permanentes. Puede que sea irracional, pero es así” (quoted by MARINIELLO 1999: 170-171, but it corresponds to DUFLOT 1980: 80).

61. Here are for instance the two first verses of a Pasolini’s poem: “Ciò che non esprimo muore. / Non voglio che nulla muoia in me” (“What I do not express dies. / I do not want anything in me to die”). Extracted from PASOLINI (2005b). *Palabras...*: 106. It is a poem of *Venti pagine di diario* 1948-1949, in “Apéndice II (1945-1947)” in *Diari 1943-1953*, in P. P. PASOLINI (2003). *Tutte le opere. Tutte le Poesie I*. Milán: Mondadori.

of his evident happiness and of having forgotten her and his two sons completely –scene 62 B, page 551. She walks back home completely depressed and one of her servants reproaches her for her resignation. She tells her that the Corinthians are frightened of her because, in her country, as a magician, she could do extraordinary things. Medea says in her turn that she has been distant from her country for ten years, that she has become another person and that she has forgotten everything. But her servant does not give up, assures her that she is still what she was and that she could recall her God. Suddenly, Medea reacts and seems to accept the new Centaur's thesis, according to which under her current stratum remains the previous one that has not disappeared: "Perhaps you're right. I'm still what I was. A glass full of a wisdom that isn't mine" –scene 62 D, pages 551-52<sup>62</sup>. She enters her room and falls down exhausted, falls asleep and dreams that she talks to the Sun, her grandfather<sup>63</sup>, who demands that she have courage. Pasolini now wants a great Medea and thus films her from a low angle, from the steps leading to her room, while she arrogantly announces the revenge she will take:

Oh God, oh justice dear to God, oh sunlight! The victory over my enemies that I foresee will be marvellous. I aim directly for my goal and I'll finally avenge myself as I must. Oh God, oh justice dear to God, oh sunlight! Listen, then, to my plans. I'll send one of my women to ask Jason to come home. I'll be very sweet to him and I'll tell him: "It's right that you should marry the King's daughter!". I'll tell him: "This marriage will be very useful to our sons"... The Nurse: Now that you have revealed your plans, we want to be useful... and we advise you to recall the most sacred human laws. M. I can no longer act another way. You cannot approve of it only because you haven't suffered like me. N: But who will give you the courage to do what you have in mind?... M: I'll find this courage by remembering that he'll be unhappy too. N: But you'll be unhappy too, poor desperate woman. M: That's enough, nurse: it's time to act. This talk is useless... go to Jason's and bring him home. But I beg you not to tell him anything about our plans. You love me and, above all, you're a woman – scene 72, pages 552-53<sup>64</sup>.

62. "Forse hai ragione. Sono restata quella che ero. Un vaso pieno di un sapere non mio".

63. *Cfr.* E. Med. 406 and 746 (DIGGLE 1987, rpr. 1989). However, it is worth bearing in mind the relation between Medea and lunar rites: "Medea is the granddaughter of the sun, of Helios: according to Mircea Eliade, related to its night side, to the world of choice of the shadows; Hades is entered through Sun's door. This ambivalence of what is solar appears already separated in the script, where Pasolini relates Medea to solar and lunar rites... The two decisive actions directly made by Medea in the film, the robbery of the Golden Fleece and the assassination –sacrifice– of her sons are made at night, while an accomplice moon looks on" ("Medea es la nieta del sol, de Helios: según Mircea Eliade, relacionada con su lado nocturno, con el mundo de elección de las tinieblas; al Hades se entra por la Puerta del Sol. Esta ambivalencia de lo solar aparece ya desglosada en el guión, donde Pasolini relaciona a Medea con ritos solares y lunares... Las dos acciones decisivas realizadas directamente por Medea en la película, el robo del Vello de Oro y el asesinato –sacrificio– de sus hijos, son llevadas a cabo de noche, bajo la mirada de una luna cómplice" –GONZÁLEZ 1997: 158).

64. "M: O Dio, o giustizia cara a Dio, o luce del Sole! La vittoria che intravedo sopra i miei nemici, sarà splendida. Ormai vado diritta al segno, e infine mi vendicherò come devo. O Dio, o giustizia cara a Dio, o luce del Sole! Ascoltate dunque i miei piani! Manderò una delle mie donne a pregare Giasone di venire da me. Sarò con lui molto dolce e gli dirò: "È giusto che tu sposi la figlia del Re!"

And, still dreaming, Medea accomplishes her plan. Jason has come and she has told him that she wants his happiness and Glauce's. Her sons will give Glauce Medea's priestess dress as a wedding gift. She tells her sons that she and their father have made peace and that she does not bear malice against him, although she cries because of some mysterious fears. Jason's ethical degradation becomes quite clear when he says that "wisdom" has finally prevailed in her and promises that he will ask King Creon (Massimo Girotti) not to exile his sons. Medea ends the meeting with a tragic sentence that her husband cannot understand: "... go now... If, as I hope, you are lucky, come back with the happy news I'm expecting" – scene 81, pages 553-54<sup>65</sup>. Glauce accepts the terrible gift although one of her servants warns her not to do it. She puts it on and the tragedy takes place when the magician's dress becomes fire and burns her. Creon tries to save her by covering his daughter with his body but they both die. End of the dream – scene 84, page 555.

Needless to say, the myth determines Pasolini's script and he cannot humanize it. The contemporary Western viewer accepts the performance of a tragedy that ends with two innocent children being killed by their mother. However, from the point of view of Christian ethics, the Declaration of Human Rights, or even Aristotle's thesis on tragedy<sup>66</sup>, such a viewer may understand Medea's reasons but still condemns them and desires the catharsis or purification of such passions. Does Pasolini also want this? This is obviously a rhetorical question, and it would be absurd to think differently. The best version of the Western World, to which he also belongs, has replaced revenge and the law of retaliation with punishment intended to correct error and rehabilitate offenders; this is the Western World that works for the abolition of the death penalty and assumes social responsibility for the errors of others, among other ideals. But now Pasolini must emphasize –as he already

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Gli dirò: "Questo matrimonio sarà molto utile ai nostri figli!" O Dio, o giustizia cara a Dio, o luce del sole! N: Poiché ci hai rivelato le tue intenzioni, noi vorremmo esserti utili ...consigliandoti di ricordare le più sante leggi umane. M: Ormai mi è impossibile agire diversamente. Voi non potete approvarmi solamente perché non avete sofferto tutti i mali che ho sofferto io. N: Ma chi ti darà il coraggio di fare ciò che hai in mente? Chi ti darà questo coraggio. M: Troverò questo coraggio: pensando che egli ne sarà reso infelice. N: Ma tu non lo sarai di meno, povera donna disperata!. M: Basta. Nutrice, basta: è tempo di agire. Queste chiachiere sono del tutto inutili. Tu, nutrice, va' da Giasone e conducimelo qui. Però ti prego non dirgli nulla dei nostri piani. Tu mi ami e per di più sei donna". *Cfr. E. Med. 764-823 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).*

65. "saggezza... andate... Se vi arriverà la buona sorte come spero, ritornate con la lieta notizia che attendiamo". When Jason arrives at Corinth accompanied by his sons in order to give Medea's present to Glauce, there are some scenes that, without an explanation by Pasolini –which I have never found- do not seem to me easy to interpret. Here is, however, Fusillo's interpretation (145): "daily scenes (children eating watermelons), ritual moments (women burning oil lamps and plaiting crowns), everything emphasized with a particularly intense music" ("scene quotidiane (bambini che mangiano angurie), momenti rituali (donne che accendono fucoli e intrecciano corone), il tutto enfatizzato da una musica particolarmente intensa").
66. Remember *Poetics*, VI 2-3 (KESSEL 1965 rpr. 1968): "Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of certain magnitude... it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions" (ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης... δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαινουσα τὴν τῶν τοιοῦτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν –translated by HAMILTON 1965).



has— the power of essential forces such as *érōs* of the more remote past, and now the revenge and justice—dear to God and, therefore, sacred— of an ancient woman. In any case, it is quite reasonable to think that Pasolini continues to send out a sign indicating to what extent human beings fight against ungovernable powers, just as very often all hate and desire for revenge inspired by any oppression on the part of any power are also ungovernable. And still a further reflection: it would be unforgivable not to notice that the sympathy that Medea demands from her women regarding her act of justice, as well as the astuteness and the wicked dissimulation with which she will act, are the tragic consequences of the centuries-old oppression that women have suffered everywhere.

And, after the dream, here comes reality. King Creon realizes that Glauce is not even happy with the wedding dress she chose – scene 63, page 555; he knows that Medea is the cause of her torture and decides to put an end to this situation. He walks down to meet Medea, tells her that he will have her and the children exiled, and confesses that he is frightened of her because of her craft in making curses. Medea, for her part, starts to carry out her plan of dissimulation by telling him that she is not offended by his words and by asking him to go ahead with the wedding. However, she begs him not to exile her and her children and appears to have decided to respect the powers that be: “I will bow my head to those who are more powerful than I”. Creon’s answer is worthy of Heraclitus’s wisdom: “Your words are certainly sweet... human... but one cannot see into the bottom of a soul”<sup>67</sup>. Having lost this battle, Medea asks him to give her at least a day to think about the exile and to ask for help for her children, Creon’s speech at this juncture shamelessly reveals the arrogance and wickedness which are peculiar to power:

C: Unfortunately, my will isn’t ruthless like that of a tyrant, and the way I am has often damaged me; I know it and I feel that I’m making a mistake. But I want to grant your request... and to tell you the truth: it isn’t out of hatred nor suspicion of your dissimilarity as a barbarian who arrived at our city with the signs of a different race that I am frightened... but for fear of what my daughter could do... She feels guilty about you and, knowing your suffering, she also suffers in her turn and cannot rest. This marriage to Jason causes her grief instead of happiness. Therefore, I want to inhumanely banish you from my kingdom so that you, though guiltless, don’t oppress her with your presence – scene 66, pages 555-556<sup>68</sup>.

67. “M: Chinerò il capo a coloro che sono più forti di me!. C: Certo le tue parole sono dolci... umane... Ma è impossibile vedere nel fondo di un’anima”. Remember in spite of the differences the fragment B 46 DK: “You will not find the limits of the soul... whatever way you take; so deep is its reason” (ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιτορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει –the translation is mine following the edition by DIELS- KRANZ 1951 rpr. 1966).

68. “C: Purtroppo il mio volere non è quello spietato di un tiranno, e la mia indole spesso mi è stata dannosa, lo so e sento di sbagliare. Ma voglio concederti ciò che mi chiedi ... E dirti la verità: non è per odio contro di te, né per sospetto della tua diversità di barbara, arrivata alla nostra città coi segni di un’altra razza, che ho paura ... ma è per timore di ciò che può fare mia figlia: che si sente colpevole verso di te e sapendo il tuo dolore, prova un dolore che non le dà pace. Tanto che per lei, queste nozze con Giasone sono ragione di lutto, anziché di felicità. È perché tu, senza colpa, non la opprime con la tua presenza che io voglio disumanamente cacciarti via dalla mia terra”. *Cfr.* E. Med. 271-356 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).



It was reasonable before to be offended by the justice of the barbarian Medea<sup>69</sup>, but Creon's justice is comparable. Indeed, Creon imposes his will because, as far as this situation is concerned, to seek harmony among opposed interests would be absurd, and furthermore, impossible. And when there is no balance, there is no stability: the lack of stability causes danger, danger in its turn causes fear, and fear is often the shelter behind which great human errors seek protection. The king needed a son-in-law; perhaps Jason has not been the only person responsible for the present situation, but also Creon and the princess Glauce. However, Medea is there, at the feet of the citadel and she has her rights. She left everything for Jason and, in addition, there are two sons. The justice of the civilized king, who is not an expert in curses, autochthonous and racially pure, involves brutally crushing the rights of Medea and her sons rather than defending them. And what is most disgusting is that this inhuman justice insists on taking a human face, as usual in fact in the case of ruthless tyrants; to sum up: he is the protagonist, tortured by guilt, of a psychological and bourgeois drama.

At this point, when this last *lógos* is as semiological as the former ones, I openly confess that I cannot imagine the extent of the reflection that Pasolini is demanding from the viewer, nor can I imagine what he would have said if he were still alive and had lived through the many spiritual catastrophes of the last forty-two years. Nevertheless, it is quite certain that, nowadays, the experts in curses –for instance, the so called “Evil empires”– have greatly increased their presence in the minds of those who monopolize Good and as a consequence the latter have hastened to annihilate the former. And it is quite certain too that, while some differences have been acknowledged and accepted as such, many others continue to be pursued in favour of a uniformity which, in a global world like ours, is tyrannically and ruthlessly imposed without the pretence of a human face<sup>70</sup>. It is quite certain too that racial hate and xenophobia are also increasing; that now there are ways to crush children's rights or to simply to kill them which are as barbarian as the ancient ones; that in the account of men's justice more and more corpses of oppressed and ill-treated women are added and, finally, that many people and even whole countries, poor or rich, live frightened, favouring a tragic consumerism of arms. And, needless to say, when power is added to fear, then...

After the visit of the king, the dream keeps becoming real; on this occasion, however, the arrival of Jason, who has been called by Medea, would confirm the

69. The one who, as Jason says in Euripides's *Medea*, 536-38, does not realize that now she is in Greece where it is a rule of law to resort to the laws. After the death of the children, Jason reminds her that a Greek woman would not have dared to act like her.

70. Uniformity considered by some interpreters of Pasolini a sort of final solution: “The history whose interruption is proclaimed by Pasolini is... the history of the dialectics originated in the class struggle, a very old history for which the bourgeois Western world has found a final solution by transforming the different and resistant classes into masses assimilated to its own way of life” (“La historia cuya interrupción anuncia Pasolini es... la de la dialéctica originada en la lucha de clases, una historia antiquísima para la que el mundo occidental burgués ha buscado una inédita solución final al transformar las clases otrora diversas y resistentes en masas asimiladas a su propia forma de vida” –PASOLINI 2005b: 333, it corresponds to the chapter “Pasolini's vocabulary: ‘Genocide’” (“Léxico pasoliniano: ‘Genocidio’”), by Mariano Maresca and Juan Ignacio Mendiguchia).

new Centaur's thesis. In effect, Jason does not want to dig down into his personality in order to find that deep stratum which would make him behave like an ancient man capable of understanding the personal tragedy of Medea. On the contrary, he walks down arrogantly from Corinth with the aim of reprimanding her severely: "It's time that, finally, clearly, you become convinced that I owe the success of my great actions to myself". And, given that it was the ungovernable *érōs* who turned her upside down into the *katastrophē*, he even dares to add: "... if you ever helped me, it was only for the love of my body"; concluding: "I've given you much more than I've received". Medea, then, cannot but go on with her dissimulation and astute lie, while Jason reaffirms his stupidity: M: "I only wanted you to forgive me... I've been unfair". J: "To forgive you? Yes, I forgive you" – scene 79, pages 556-557<sup>71</sup>.

Pasolini cannot leave aside now the coherence of the script as it was originally conceived, but prior to and especially after his death, this approach has fortunately become more and more politically incorrect. Jason, the masculine pole of the present binary opposition, acts guided by reason and calculation, he has a cause (*aitia*) and a goal (*télos*); Medea, on the contrary, acts guided by her emotions, feelings and sensuality. Critical female viewers have demanded and still demand the same intellectual capacity for the feminine pole, lest people believe that women's intellect only serves to conceive wicked strategies and sexual pleasures. Pasolini, however, was never politically correct<sup>72</sup> and, with regard to the character Medea, he was interested in emphasizing her radical option, since her spontaneous love caused by emotion was sacred by comparison with Jason's calculations when he thought about how to rob the golden fleece so that his uncle would restore the throne to him.

And, if we opt for a political interpretation of the whole scene, it would not be difficult to conclude that all the Powers with imperial or colonial vocation, whatever the time, nature or name –although Pasolini denounces above all the Power of contemporary neocapitalism<sup>73</sup>– have always behaved like the Jason we have just

71. "J: È ora che tu ti convinca infine, chiaramente, che io devo soltanto a me stesso la buona riuscita delle mie imprese... se hai fatto qualcosa per me, lo hai fatto solo per amore del mio corpo... ti ho dato infine molto più di quello che ho ricevuto. M: Volevo soltanto che tu mi perdonassi... Io sono stata ingiusta. J: Perdonarti? Ma sì, ti perdono". Cfr. E. Med. 526-531 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).

72. And, furthermore, he remembers Euripides's *Medea*, in which Jason maintains, 569-574 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989), that women should not exist and mortals should have children in a different way.

73. "I write "Power" with the capital letter P... only because I do not know what it consists of and who wields it... I do not recognize it in the Vatican, nor... nor... do I recognize it in the large industry... I rather consider it a whole (total industrialization)... non-Italian (transnational)... I know its... (successful) determination to transform the peasants and the underproletarians into *petite bourgeois*, and above all its cosmic desire for carrying "development" to its ultimate consequences: to produce and to consume" ("Escribo "Poder" con P mayúscula... sólo porque no sé en qué consiste este nuevo Poder y quién lo ejerce... No lo reconozco en el Vaticano, ni... ni... Tampoco lo reconozco en la gran industria... me parece más bien como un todo (industrialización total)... no italiano (transnacional)... conozco... su (exitosa) determinación de transformar a los campesinos y al subproletariado en pequeños burgueses, y sobre todo su anhelo cósmico de llevar hasta sus últimas consecuencias el "desarrollo": producir y consumir" –PASOLINI 2005b. *Palabras...*: 249, in the chapter entitled "The true fascism and, therefore, the true anti-fascism" ("El verdadero fascismo y por tanto el verdadero antifascismo")).

seen. They absolutely vindicate the success of their actions when they have proven to be civilizing or beneficial. From their point of view, those who were civilized have always wanted to enjoy and take advantage of the Emperor's body –to be interpreted freely– and, needless to say, in spite of having caused innumerable sufferings and disasters, the Powers are always convinced that they give much more than what they receive in return. The victims no longer beg their pardon nor say that it was they who were unfair, but some empires, whatever the time, nature or name, have believed and still firmly believe that they can and must pardon them.

The ensuing scenes reproduce what Medea had already seen in her dreams<sup>74</sup> except for one change: Glauce's wedding dress, which Medea gave her with her best wishes for happiness, does not become fire but drives her mad and she jumps from the wall surrounding Corinth followed by her father, who also dies<sup>75</sup>. With the probable aim of strengthening the human side of Medea –although she is firmly decided to sacrifice her two sons in order to punish Jason– Pasolini presents her more motherly than ever before. It is time for her children to go to sleep; she purifies them with a cleansing bath, embraces and caresses them lovingly and, as in Greek tragedies, we do not contemplate the terrible act but we will know that her sons have been already sacrificed only from the fleeting vision of a bloody dagger –scene 95, page 559. The next day at dawn Medea sets fire to the house, a burning pyre for the corpses, and waits for Jason in order to dialectically consummate her revenge<sup>76</sup>:

M: Why do you try to pass through the fire? You cannot do it. It's useless to try. You can talk to me if you want but I don't want you to be near me or to touch me.  
 J: What have you done? What have you done? Aren't you suffering too, like me?  
 M: I want to suffer so that you cannot laugh. J: But your own God will condemn you. Enough! M: Yes, enough. What do you want from me? J: Let me bury my children and mourn them. M: You? You had better go back to bury your wife!  
 J: Yes, I will but without my children. M. The tears you shed now are nothing: you'll realize it when you are old. J: In the name of your god, I beg you, let me caress these poor innocent corpses once more! M: No. Don't keep insisting, it's useless! Nothing is possible any more –scene 97, pages 559-60<sup>77</sup>.

74. *Cfr.* E. *Med.* 866-975 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).

75. FUSILLO (p. 153) maintains that this is a modification inspired directly by the drama *Lunga notte di Medea* by Corrado Alvaro, and adds: "The two versions of the first revenge of Medea, juxtaposed in the film, represent the polarity which is the base of the whole of Pasolini's *Medea*: magic/rational, mythic/realistic also reflected in the two *dénouements*: magic assassination/suicide" ("Le due versioni della prima vendetta di Medea che si giustappongono nel film rappresentano così le polarità base di tutta la Medea pasoliniana: magico/razionale; mitico/realistico, che si riflettono anche nei due scioglimenti: uccisione per magia/suicidio").

76. In this respect, see, e.g.: SEGAL (1996).

77. "M: Perché cerchi di passare attraverso il fuoco? Non potrai farlo. È inutile tentare. Se vuoi parlar-mi, puoi farlo, ma senza avermi vicino né toccarmi. J: Che cosa hai fatto, che cosa hai fatto? Ora, non soffri anche tu come me? M: Pur che tu non rida, io voglio soffrire. J: Ma quel tuo stesso Dio ti condannerà. Basta! M: Sì Basta. E che cosa vuoi da me? J: Lasciami seppellire i figli e piangerli. M: Tu? Torna piuttosto a seppellire la tua sposa! J: Sì, ci andrò ma senza i miei due bambini. M: Ora il tuo pianto non è niente: te ne accorgerai nella tua vecchiaia! J: Per il tuo caro Dio, ti sconsiglio,

We began by reflecting on the primitive world and now we have returned to it. Medea, unlike the old Centaur, speaks –and, above all, acts– and does not need anyone to do it for her. However, her logic is very different from ours and, as the new Centaur said regarding the old Centaur’s way of reasoning, we cannot understand it. Our questions are very predictable: Why must the children pay for the villainy of their father?<sup>78</sup> What is the sense of punishing Jason if Medea will also suffer the loss – the most tragic one– of her two sons?<sup>79</sup> Has she only thought of Jason’s old age? If Medea has already eliminated her enemy and punished the king, if in fact she has already taken revenge on Jason, what is the sense of sacrificing the children? Does she not realize that, after the terrible act, there is no escape either for her or for them? How could we believe that Medea is still alive after the terrible death of Glaucus and the king? No, with the help of our logic we cannot understand Medea and, as a consequence, should we think about her in a different way<sup>80</sup>. It is not, however, an easy task because, according to Pasolini’s thesis, there has been an anthropological change conceived as a superposition of many strata on an ancient base, thus overwhelming the traditional mind and feelings of the true *ánthrōpos* to the extent of asphyxiating them. Pasolini, for his part, is a *rara avis* (“I am a force of the Past. / I feel love only for tradition”<sup>81</sup>), he thinks rather than philosophises<sup>82</sup>,

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lasciami accarezzare ancora una volta quei poveri corpi innocenti! M: No. Non insistere, ancora, è inutile! Niente è più possibile, ormai”. *Cfr.* E. Med. 1317-1322; 1361-63; 1377; 1389-1404 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).

78. *Cfr.* E. Med. 116-17 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).

79. *Cfr.* E. Med. 1046-47 (DIGGLE 1987 rpr. 1989).

80. “Nowadays the power of both reason and the experts prevails... every time a mother kills one of her children, a legion of psychologists, criminologists, pedagogues and judges... appear to explain the Truth to common people. What is the sense of a mother killing her son in the washing machine? Is she a monster? Or perhaps is she a person who experiences the sort of tragic tensions portrayed in Pasolini’s *Medea*? With Pasolini Italy witnessed for the last time the staging of the tragic nature of existence. The relationship between Pasolini and Greece does not have to do with Greek philosophy... but rather with tragedy: the greatest staging of passions ever known in the Western World. Tragedy is the defence of the abyss of desperation” (“Hoy asistimos al dominio de la racionalidad y de los expertos... cada vez que una madre asesina a su hijo, una legión de psicólogos, criminólogos, pedagogos y jueces... comparecen para explicar al pueblo la Verdad. ¿Qué significado tiene que una madre meta a su hijo en la lavadora? ¿Es un monstruo? ¿O quizás es una persona que vive el tipo de trágicas tensiones que se muestran en la *Medea* de Pasolini? Con Pasolini Italia asistió por última vez a la escenificación de la condición trágica de la existencia. La relación de Pasolini con Grecia no tiene que ver tanto con la filosofía griega... cuanto con la tragedia: la mayor escenificación de las pasiones que se ha conocido en el mundo occidental. La tragedia es la defensa del abismo de la desesperación” –MARESCA 2006: 46, from the chapter entitled “We all are in danger” (“Todos estamos en peligro”) by Pietro Barcellona).

81. “Io sono una forza del Passato. / Solo nella tradizione è il mio amore” –“Mundane poetry” (“Poesie mundane”), PASOLINI (1964).

82. Which causes him to consider himself another Socrates: “Here speaks a miserable and powerless Socrates / who knows how to think but not how to philosophize, / who is proud yet / not only to be an expert // (the most exposed and careless) / in historical changes, but also / to be directly / and desperately interested in them” (“Parla, qui, un misero e impotente Socrate / che sa pensare e non filosofare, / il quale ha tuttavia l’orgoglio / non solo d’essere intenditore // (il più esposto e negletto) / dei cambiamenti storici, ma anche / di esserne direttamente / e disperatamente interessato”) –PASOLINI (2005b): 279, in “Thin verses like lines of rain” (“Versi sottili come righe di

he has lived intensely and tragically<sup>83</sup> and, as a result, can make us understand, by means of the semiological power of an ancient myth transformed into images<sup>84</sup>, that Medea and Jason's tragedy is also ours<sup>85</sup>, that we have experienced a spiritual catastrophe, a conversion in reverse. The myth is timeless, but if, moreover, it is performed and filmed in a place where the narrative of the ancient tale still persists, then it becomes reality, and reality, as we have observed, is a system of signs to be interpreted<sup>86</sup>, thus we have done so. On the other hand, words in Pasolini's *Medea* do not play the same significant role as in the eponymous Greek tragedy, so that the scope for interpretation expands considerably and, needless to say, the reader has the inalienable right to judge whether or not my reflections throughout these pages seem to be reasonable.

Nevertheless, I should not like to conclude this contribution without justifying what has been a conscious choice, evidently open to criticism like any other. First of all I must recognize that, reflecting on Pasolini's *Medea* –in my case from the perspective of the Classical Tradition– I could choose whether or not to accept his hermeneutic demands. For instance, I could have opted –but with little chance to say something new– for the rigorous confrontation of Pasolini's text with

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pioggia”), published for the first time in *Sul Porto*, n. 3, 1974; republished in *La nuova gioventù. Poesie friulane*. Torino: Einaudi, 1974.

83. “... if he knows everything, it is because he has experienced everything. When he was asked what was the basis of his statements and denunciations in the last texts (defined by him as “corsair” –“corsari”-), he answered: ‘I know all these things because I live them’” (“... si lo sabe todo, es porque lo ha experimentado todo. A quien le preguntaba cuál era el fundamento de sus afirmaciones y denuncias en los últimos escritos (que él definía como “corsari”) respondía: ‘todo esto lo sé porque lo vivo’” –FANTUZZI 1978: 21-2). “... I pay a price for the life I lead... It is like someone descending to hell. But when I come back –if I do– I have seen other things, more things” (“... por la vida que llevo pago un precio... Es como alguien que baja al infierno. Pero cuando vuelvo –si es que vuelvo– he visto otras cosas, más cosas”) –PASOLINI (2005b). *Palabras*...: 309, it corresponds to the chapter entitled “We all are in danger” (“Todos estamos en peligro”).
84. On the Greek and Latin world in Pasolini's works, see, e.g. TODINI (1995).
85. “Greece is our past –a past that affects the present and conditions it... This is the reason why the ancient characters and subjects fuse together and become contaminated by the contemporary and historical characters and events... The classicism of tragedy... addressed to the contemporaneity of the bourgeois audience, has the capacity of activating not only the terror of death but also the horror of the present” (“La grecità e il nostro passato –un passato che ha attinenza col presente e anzi lo condiziona... Per questo i personaggi e i temi antichi e greci si fondono e si contaminano con personaggi e eventi della contemporaneità e della storia... La classicità della tragedia... rivolta alla contemporaneità del pubblico borghese, ha la capacità di attivare non soltanto il terrore della morte, ma l'orrore del presente”) –PASSERI 2010: 112). On *Medea* throughout the centuries, see, e.g.: PÓRTULAS (2004) and LÓPEZ & POCIÑA (2002).
86. “Medea and Jason are in fact two symbolic characters who represent, on the one hand, a primitive culture, magic and sacred, and, on the other, a modern, rational and bourgeois culture... to this cultural bipolarity... become superimposed a psychoanalysis bipolarity between Es and Ego (Pasolini stated... to have conceived Jason and Medea as a sole character), and a policy between the Western World and the Third World” (“Medea e Giasone sono infatti due personaggi simbolici, che rappresentano da una parte una cultura primitiva, magica e sacrale, dall'altra una cultura moderna, razionalistica e borghese... a questa bipolarità culturale se ne sovrappone una psicanalitica tra Es ed Ego (Pasolini affermava... di aver concepito Giasone e Medea come un unico personaggio), e una politica fra Occidente e Terzo Mondo” –FUSILLO, 134).

Euripides's. Consequently, it is quite evident that I have accepted with pleasure the intellectual game, the invitation of the Italian director, consisting of interpreting signs, thus not criticizing his conception and use of Semiology as such<sup>87</sup>. In this respect, Costa (1977) on a certain occasion already pointed out the claims made by a true expert in this field: Umberto Eco:

Umberto Eco dismissed Pasolini's notion that 'the smallest units of cinematic language are real objects reproduced on the screen' as a 'remarkably naive kind of semiology'. Eco pointed out that the ideas of the director contradict 'the most elementary principles of semiology, which hold that facts of nature become cultural phenomena, and do not reduce cultural facts to natural phenomena (p. 39). In spite of Pasolini's various attempts to engage in a semiology of cinema, his initial premise... i.e. the cinema as the language of reality is decidedly anti-semiological (p. 41).

On the other hand, accepting his intellectual game entailed enjoying the poetry of barbarism<sup>88</sup>; completely avoiding the neoclassical idealisation of Ancient Greece, thus opting for anthropology and psychoanalysis; not rejecting oppositions too sharp and lacking in nuance –above all, ancient/contemporary times; country/city; agriculture and crafts/industry-production-consumerism; denying the dialectic synthesis of historical development; excessively demonizing the First World and often exempting the Third World from clear responsibilities, etc., etc. In any case, I doubt there are any viewers who, because of their radical acceptance of the Italian director's ideology, close their eyes and minds to the undeniable rigidities of his *Medea*. However, as a teacher of the Classical Tradition and, as a consequence, being used to the adaptation of the Greek legacy to very different ideologies and sensibilities<sup>89</sup>, or simply as a reader and admirer of the Greek tragedy, I consider his mythical and semiological exercise –condemned by Eco– truly original, brilliant and acceptably provocative. He is not the only cinema director who has used Greek tragedy –*lato sensu*– to prompt the contemporary viewer to reflect on the ethical miseries of our world and its crisis of values –I am thinking now, for example, of Woody Allen<sup>90</sup>– but few like Pasolini, having fallen in love with the past and now trying to revive it, have been able to situate themselves right in the middle of the critical tension peculiar to tragedy –between those irreconcilable poles– in order to equate it with what he considers the excessive Power of Reason. Or in the precise words of Pietro Barcellona – MARESCA (2006: 44), in the chapter entitled “We all are in danger” (“Todos estamos en peligro”):

Criticism of enlightened rationalism and the return to tragedy are the hallmark of Pasolini. The key to his success is the tragic contradiction, which we must understand not in dialectical terms but as a permanent and insoluble coexistence of opposites rather than of differences: a sort of structural ambivalence of the civilized

87. See e.g.: DESOGUS (2017).

88. See e.g.: MORÁN (2014).

89. See e.g.: SALVADOR (2002); and also TOVAR (2002).

90. See e.g.: GILABERT (2009a and 2009b).



human beings of Western Culture coming from the Greek legacy that... has deeply marked Pasolini's life and works.

La crítica del racionalismo ilustrado y el regreso a la tragedia constituyen el santo y seña de Pasolini. La clave de su actualidad es la contradicción trágica, entendida no en términos dialécticos sino como una permanente e irresoluble coexistencia no tanto de las diferencias cuanto de los opuestos: una especie de ambivalencia estructural de los seres humanos civilizados en la cultura occidental a partir de la herencia griega que... ha marcado profundamente la vida y las obras de Pasolini.

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